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ABSTRACT

Logical positivism, or logical empiricism, emphasizes rationality, especially preferring the verification of facts over speculation. This report clearly places traditional research methodology in education in the arena of logical positivism. Since reality is seen as ordered and objective, assumptions are made about people and the gathering of data. Human behavior is rational, and problems can be solved rationally. The regularities of human behavior will result in laws of human behavior. Data can be gathered without altering the organization being studied. Organizations are seen as basically similar whether they are schools, businesses, political organizations, or health-care organizations. The role of administration will also be similar. Any administrator maintains order through rewards and sanctions for the purpose of attaining organizational goals. Many sources are cited as currently advocating positivistic theory, including textbooks for educational administration. (Contains 28 references.) (RKJ)

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POSITIVISTIC EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

RESEARCH, THEORY, AND PRACTICE

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POSITIVISTIC EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION: RESEARCH, THEORY, AND PRACTICE

The empirical method of logical positivism is the traditional research methodology for all of education, including educational administration. The quantified studies which count the number of instances of a particular behavior or attitude are prolific in educational literature. Lutz (1992) listed some of the current applications of logical positivistic thought and procedures apparent in education: required pupil achievement testing, use of weighted, residual gain achievement scores for accountability, use of criterion tests to rank school districts, state teacher ratings as a basis for merit pay, consolidation of school districts to increase central office power, and the centralization of curriculum in the name of state education reform. When applied to educational administration research, theory, and practice, logical positivism provides a quantified, objectified, and generalized view of how school administration researchers and practitioners should function in their respective fields.

Positivistic Educational Administration Research

The positivistic assumptions of an ordered, objective reality which can be known only through objective knowledge led positivistic theorists to accept empiricism as the means to know objective reality in an objective manner. The method of empiricism is to discover regularities through hypothesis testing by systematic observation.

Such research is the traditional methodology in education as exemplified by Goodlad's 1984 study of U.S. schooling or Rutter et al.'s 1979 study of effective secondary education. These studies investigated the possible statistical relationships between specific and measurable school variables such as: time on task, test scores, parental occupation, length of class time, and rate of discipline referrals. Foster (1986) explained that mainstream theorists in educational administration focus on studies of communication patterns, role structures, school climate, and motivation patterns. In empirical research, variables are compared and contrasted and a high statistical degree of significance suggests that a relationship--positive or negative--may exist. For a finding to move beyond a hypothetical stance, it would have to be replicated consistently and then the hypothetical findings could be viewed as theoretical.

Empirical methodology assumes that people can act independently of that reality and, by maintaining strict controls over experimentation, no interaction or only minimal interaction will occur between the experimenter and the experiment. Non-interference must be assumed if the results are deemed to be objective. Thus, study of educational administration is viewed to present a true picture of reality because the obtaining of descriptive data in no way can change that which is being studied. The results of the research will continue to be viewed as plausible until future studies can prove them false.

Empiricism also assumes typification of results. Findings under positivistic methodology are not specific to the time and place of the experiment. Exact replication of the findings under new similar circumstances and with new similar subjects assures the

researchers of their ability to generalize. Typification also is noted in the hypothesis statement which is general to the circumstances but particular to the variables. Weick (1967) clarified that the reason for this ability to generalize results is that the content of the experiment is determined by the theory and not by the referent event. What is studied and discovered is the typified behavior which is not subject to change due to time and place. Objective reality is independent of situational aspects. Thus, findings in studies on administrative behavior in whatever circumstances can be and is applicable to all educational administration behavior, irregardless of the persons or situations involved.

Precision is sought in empirical methodology through the use of measurement. Measurement is abstract, neutral, and objective and, as such, in no way can interfere with the research. Precision is necessary because the goal of this research method is to predict and ultimately control human phenomena. As investigation into educational administration behavior continues, replication of findings will lead to theory building with the ultimate aim of discovering laws which underlie all administrative behavior, regardless of the circumstances. When laws are found so as to predict causation--if A, then B-- then the most effective means of administering schools will be known. Due to the inherent rationality of all human behavior, including behavior of school administrators, school administration behavior will logically adhere to these laws. Until such laws are found, empirical methodology will continue to generate theories which enable school administrators to administer schools more effectively.

Traditional educational administration research is grounded in the empirical method. By seeking to discover generalizable regularities in the actions of school administrators, the positivistic researcher maintains an objective approach by systematic hypothesis testing through objective observation. Such research generates theories which become the basis for school administration behavior. Ultimately, empirical research of school administration behavior has as its goal the control of current school administration behavior and the prediction of future school administration behavior.

Positivistic Educational Administration Theory

Educational administration theory developed under a positivistic perspective and assumed the same characteristics as sociobehavioral and organizational theories. In the positivistic perspective, educational administration theory has evolved into the application of organizational theory to education. As such, the basic tenets of sociobehavioral theory can be and are applied to schooling. As Hoy and Miskel (1996) clarified, "Theory in educational administration. . . has the same role as theory in physics, chemistry, biology or psychology--that is, providing general explanations and guiding research" (p. 1).

Theory for the positivistic theorist is based upon two general assumptions: first, the inherent order of reality; second, the objective nature of reality. Because of the inherent order of reality, the educational administrator with a positivistic perspective views orderliness not as a goal to be attained but as an existing quality of the world, society, school, and of human behavior which must be maintained. This order is best described in the positivistic search for laws which underlie all of natural and human life. These

underlying laws enable generalizations to be discovered and applied to similar phenomena. Schools are viewed as types of organizations and the behavior of people within all types of organizations can be studied and compared. Theories about school administration are seen to be general theories about administration applied to schools.

Schools can be observed without interference by the observer. Objectivity can be maintained because the observed phenomena and the observer are both objective entities. Thus, schools can be objectively defined as types of organizations and various models of organizational function and behavior can be applied to them. The classic model of business as applied to schools is the production model which Greenfield (1975) defined as "a set of roles and resources arranged to yield a product which conforms to predetermined goals" (p. 93).

Schools being viewed as types of organizations is consistent with the assumption of positivistic theory which assumes that, as a form of social substructure, organizations such as schools have an objective existence and can be studied as entities in themselves. Schools are one type of organization and the attributes of similar organizations can be applied to schools. As Greenfield (1975) indicated:

> The common view in organization studies holds that people occupy organizations in somewhat the same way as they inhabit houses. The tenants may change but, apart from wear and tear, the basic structure remains and in some way shapes the behavior of people. (pp. 1 & 2)

Thus, the positivist school administrator must study all types of organizations and then apply the theories of similar organizations to schools.

Because schools are viewed as a type of organization, the study of organizational theory is imperative for a school administrator. Morgan (1986), who presented metaphors as the bases for theories and explanations of organizational life, explained the generalizability of organizational study:

> Effective managers and professionals in all walks of life, whether they be business executives, public administrators, organizational consultants, politicians, or trade unionists, have to become skilled in the art of 'reading' the situations that they are attempting to organize or manage. (p. 11)

Organizations have similarities which can be applied to any type of organization and school administrators, under the positivistic perspective, are to apply the generalizations about other organizations to school organizations

Hoy and Miskel (1982) described such generalized application of organizational characteristics as typologies which are seen as beneficial to the researcher in that they "allow for a comparative study of organizations as diverse as businesses, schools, prisons and churches" (p. 32). Therefore, the application of characteristics of administrative behavior in the business field to the behavior of school administrators (Blake & Mouton, 1981; Katz & Kahn, 1978; Williams, Wall, Martin, & Berchin, 1974) is viewed by the positivistic theorist as consistent with the inherent ordering of human behavior and the application of this order across differing manifestations of human behavior.

Under the positivistic perspective, schools are not unique organizations, but types of organizations which have similarities with other organizations. As Kowalski & Reitzug (1993) proposed:

> Although motives, goals, and structures in these two organizations (school systems and private enterprises) are quite different, leaders share common interests with regard to human behavior and goal achievement. In this regard, organizational studies have a universal value for all institutions. (pp. 161-162)

While organizational behavior in schools can be applied to business organizations, generally business theories and behaviors from business organizations are applied to school behavior. This application is apparent in the use of Total Quality Management in the school setting as explained by Schomaker and Wilson (1993) and Weller (1993) and the use of organizational culture in the school setting (Schein, 1985).

Typification of behavior also can be viewed in the consistent use of the term "role" in relation to formal actions in education. Katz and Kahn (1978) defined a role as the "recurring actions of an individual appropriately interrelated with the repetitive activities of others so as to yield a predictable outcome" (p. 189). Kast and Rosenzweig (1979) further expounded on this concept by defining an organization as "role systems" (p. 272). Thus, administrators, whether in schools, business, politics or health care, assume specific roles which are related in that these roles encompass the same elements of decision making, leadership, power, motivation, and goal-orientation. Some attempt has been make to include situational aspects into management behavior by Fiedler, but his contingency

model adheres to strict positivistic assumptions when it specifies the general leadership styles and the type of tasks to be accomplished (Hoy & Miskel, 1982).

As both Greenfield (1979-1980) and Foster (1982) found in reviewing graduate-level educational administration textbooks, educational administration theory was firmly grounded in positivistic organizational theory. Such textbooks as Organization and Management by Kast and Rosenzweig (1979), The Social Psychology of Organization by Katz and Kahn (1978), and Educational Administration by Hoy and Miskel (1982) stressed school administration as linked to systems theory, contingency theory, role theory, leadership theory, and decision making theory. These theories are adapted to schools and schools are viewed as social substructures or a type of organization. While typified behavior is accepted within organizations, the characteristics of organizations also are typified and applied to different organizations. No matter how different the goals are of each organization, positivistic educational administration theorists assume that one can study the same characteristics in all organizations.

An example of such application of positivistic organizational assumptions to educational administration theory is the text by Katz and Kahn (1978) which was used extensively in educational administration courses. The text concerns organizations in general and the reader is left to apply the concepts presented to the type of organization of interest to the reader. Katz and Kahn posited that organizations may be classified according to their genotypic function or the relation between the activities of the organization and its social system. Schools were viewed as both maintenance and adaptive

organizations in that they are responsible for socialization for the status quo of society and also for the development of new knowledge.

Kast and Rosenzweig (1979) applied organizational theory to education in the form of systems theory. As such, management was viewed as a subsystem of the organization whose goal is to "develop congruence between the organization and the environment" (p. 62). Such extrapolation of general concepts of management to school administrators is possible because of the positivistic assumption of typification of behavior. Hoy and Miskel (1996) indicated that the social systems model is general and, while the basic elements remain the same, the model can be defined so as to fit specific types of organizations.

The positivistic approach to educational theory defines a generalized and abstract view of human behavior. Cross-categorical perspectives are justified due to the assumed regularities of human behavior which are based on the assumed underlying laws of all phenomena. The positivistic theoretical position also assumes that the generation of consistent theories regarding human behavior eventually will result in the discovery of laws for human behavior, and for educational administration behavior, which would be equal to the laws discovered for natural phenomena.

Traditional educational administration theory thus can be seen to be derived from the logical positivistic model of sociobehavioral theory. A school is defined as a type of organization whose members engage in rational behavior as exemplified in role behavior and goal orientation. Schools are studied as they are. Empirical researchers accept the

basic structures and roles in schools while seeking to learn how schools might work more efficiently (Cooper, 1992). Such rationality is exemplified in role behavior, goals, and homeostasis. Because of the objective nature of the school as an organization and because of typification of behavior in the school, traditional educational administration theorists have logically utilized the empirical model in their research.

Positivistic Educational Administration Practice

Research generates theories which provide direction fo and/or explanation of practice. Because the goal of empirical research is to predict future administrative behavior and, thereby, gain control over such behavior, the positivistic theorist seeks to discover those administrative behaviors which would be most effective. Also, because administrative action is generalizable under this perspective, effective administrative action in any field can be applied to the behavior of school administrators. Thus, while positivism's goal is to discover what is, it also seeks to discover relationships between variables and these relationships point to what is or is not effective. Because human behavior is rational, the result of this discovery can be directive in that effective behavior would best be followed.

While positivistic theories stipulate effective behaviors and thus directly relate research to practice, under the positivistic perspective, research and practice are separated. According to Schon (1983):

> Researchers are supposed to provide the basic and applied science from which to derive techniques for diagnosing and solving the problems of practice.

> Practitioners are supposed to furnish researchers with problems for study and with tests of the utility of research results. The researcher's role is distinct from, and usually considered superior to, the role of the practitioner. (p. 26)

This distinction between the creators of theories and those who apply theories places an inherent barrier between the researcher and the practitioner. Theory is primary and skills in application of the theory are secondary. The researcher provides the practitioners with theories of best practice and the practitioner is to implement these practices because they are the most rational and based on research.

Under the positivistic perspective, schools have specific goals which are to be achieved. These school goals, according to Popkewitz (1984), are "distinct from practice and examined separately" (p. 40). However, self-sustaining goals do define the roles of the personnel within schools in that goals give direction to action. Greenfield (1975) explained this relationship between school goals and administrative behavior: "School administrators bring people and resources together so that the goals of the organizations and presumably of an encompassing social order may be met. . . . the administrator mediates between the organization and the people within it" (p. 73). As a mediator, the administrator sustains the school goals and focuses the direction of school personnel action to the attainment of these goals.

In order to accomplish this task, the administrator, under the positivistic perspective, assumes an underlying order of schools based upon the inherent order of

natural and human phenomena and upon the inherent rationality of human behavior. Thus the administrator becomes a maintainer of this order by seeking to deter any deviations from the attainment of school goals by sanctioning any irrational behavior by any member of the school community. Deviation is not tolerated at any level of the school. The scalar chain of command assures that control is maintained for every subsequent level of school personnel by every preceding level in the organizational structure. Those members who work to attain school goals are rewarded accordingly.

The school organization, however, does not remain static. External influences seek to change school goals and the administrator's role is to "mediate the impact of event sequences from external sources, and filter the influences that stem from links between rival centers of influence" (Smith, 1976, p. 137). In order to decide which influence shall or shall not be allowed to change the school focus, administrators, according to Bennis (1963), make their decisions based on positivistic research:

> Change can be defined as a process of bringing together a change agent and client system to plan and attain an improved state of functioning in the client system by utilizing and applying valid knowledge. (p. 139)

For school administrators, the goals of the school remain primary and all administrative decisions, mediations, behaviors, and personnel evaluations are defined by these goals.

In order to maintain the inherent order of schools, administrators must assume the role of problem solvers. Solutions to problems must be rational because of the inherent rationality of people. Schon (1993) viewed problem solving as the primary process of

professional practice in that problems should be solved through the selection, from available means, of the one best suited to the established goals. Problem solving is unique to leaders and, in schools, to the administrators. The top down bureaucratic model allows for input from others in the school organization, but clearly delineates the administrator as the ultimate decision-making person.

Because behavior in organizations is generalizable, the role of the school administrator as a leader is derived from the effective leadership behaviors in other organizations. Leadership is viewed as a general skill which is then applied in the school. Empirical study can produce knowledge about leadership which will make its exercise more effective in whatever setting leadership occurs. Leadership is defined by specific skills or traits such as intelligence, physical stature, appearance, and facility with language (Slater, 1995). Blake and Mouton (1986) developed a grid of leadership behaviors by which individuals can compare themselves to the styles of effective leaders. Covey (1991) assumed that the same principles are effective for the behavior of all leaders in any organization. By studying and learning the specific skills of leadership, a school administrator can more effectively lead his or her school.

The positivistic perspective of school administration practice poses administrative behavior as generalizable with focus placed on overt actions. Subjective elements, such as intention, cannot be objectified and, therefore, hold no position in this paradigm's explication of practice. The goals of the school define role behavior for all members of the

school. The administrative role is to facilitate attainment of these goals by maintaining the inherent order within the school setting.

Overview

The following assumptions are the bases for positivistic theory, research, and practice of school administration:

1. Schools are a type of organization.
2. Typified characteristics of any organization can be applied to schools.
3. Typified characteristics of any administrative behavior in any organization can be applied to administrative behavior in schools.
4. Schools are social entities which can be studied independently of their members.
5. Schools are inherently rational and ordered.
6. School goals provide the direction for action and the structure for order.
7. Empirical research is applied to schools and to administrative behavior in schools to discover regularities and, ultimately, laws.

The underlying philosophical assumption regarding the order of reality is intrinsic to understanding the application of the positivistic paradigm to school administration. The positivistic perspective of educational administration assumes reality as inherently ordered. Empirical research seeks to elucidate this order by the discovery of assumed regularities in administrative behavior. Thus, administrative action is viewed as typified action which can be objectively observed in order to generate theories and, ultimately, laws. Theories produced from empirical research are assumed to be generalizable so that educational

administration behavior is seen as just one type of administration. Thus, educational administration theory, under the positivistic perspective, can be and is derived from other theoretical sources and applied to educational administration action; likewise, educational administration theory can be applied to other forms of administrative behavior.

Because schools are assumed to be objective and inherently ordered, as is all reality, the administrative role is to maintain that order in the school setting through rewards and sanctions for the purpose of attaining objective school goals. This assumed inherent order of reality for the positivistic educational administration theorist provides focus for the abstraction of patterns of behavior such as decision making, leadership style, goalsetting, power, and personnel evaluation in order to establish control over the school environment and eventually to predict effective administrative actions.

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